[Andrew Johnson]

Beliefs and customs - Life histories Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK [7?]

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York City

NAME OF WORKER Levi C. Hubert

ADDRESS 353 West 118th St. Manhattan.

DATE November 28, 1938

SUBJECT “I DID MY BIT FOR DEMOCRACY” [md] ANDREW JOHNSON

War experiences.

1. Date and time [of?] interview

Afternoon of November 20, 1938

2. Place of interview

465 Carlton Avenue, Brooklyn

3. Name and address of informant

Andrew Johnson 465 Carlton Ave. Brooklyn

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

A sitting room-bedroom kitchenette apartment in a three-story, frame house on a street halfway between Atlantic Ave. and Fulton St. War mementoes...a shell case, a gas mask, a helmet, a Company picture taken at Camp [Heado?], Md. of Co. G. 368th Infantry regiment...

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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NAME OF WORKER Levi C. Hubert

ADDRESS 353 West 118th St. Man.

DATE November 28, 1938

SUBJECT ” I DID MY BIT FOR DEMOCRACY” [md] ANDREW JOHNSON.

The news came that every male between the ages of 21-31 was to go to one of the numerous Local Draft Boards set up in every part of the country.

I registered with the Local Draft Board, Swarthmore, Pa. on June 5, 1917 and was given a card with the number 1493. If this number were drawn out of a large glass bowl in the Quarter-master General's Office in Washington, then I was told to report back to the L. D.

B. This was the beginning of nearly a year-long period of reporting to one place or another, both in American and France.

All Summer long I anxiously scanned the daily papers for the list of numbers as published by the War Department. In September I accepted a teaching job in Virginia, but had been there hardly a month when 1493 appeared, so back I came to report to the Local Draft Board and claimed exemption because I was the sole support of my aged widowed mother and two sisters and a brother. Then, too, all teachers were supposed to be exempt from military service.

But my claims for exemption were denied. I found out later, that the chairman of the Local Draft Board, a coal yard operator named Green, had summarily placed my name on the list of men to 2 go to war because he had exhausted the exemptions allowed and was compelled to fill out the quota.

A special train came through one day in October and I said good-bye to my family and climbed aboard, with eight other colored men from my town. Every town the train passed through contributed its quota of young men, so that when we reached Admiral, Maryland, the train was crowded with wildly cheering, excited heroes-to-be.

Alighting from the train, we were told to line up and follow several military-appearing men. The contingent, composed of men dressed in old clothes and carrying suitcases, straggled up the road several miles until we came to a cantonment called Meade, named after a Civil War general.

Here we were lined up again, told to file into a large mess hall where we found that the Army ate other vegetables besides beans. After mess we lined up again for medical inspection, then marched off to a supply station and issued Army uniforms and equipment. Dress shoes and heavy hob-nailed field shoes, an O. D. tunic, shirt, trousers, underwear,

socks, a necktie, handkerchiefs, towels and soap. Also two tightly rolled bundles of wool called spiral [puttees?]. This last almost made me quit the Army.

We marched back to some dormatories and were assigned a cot, blankets, and told to report to the parade grounds after changing into uniform.

The building I was in had about [25o?] men, and each one of them was struggling with tunics with too-tight collars, or complaining about too-large shoes, hardly any one had been lucky enough to get a perfect fit. But every one was troubled by the spiral [puttees?]. How to get what looked like a roll of O. D. bandage wrapped around one's leg! That was the question.

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While we were engaged in typing, lacing, and buttoning these strange garments which go to make up a U. S. Army uniform, an orderly told us to fall in at the parade grounds. We did. And such a sight. Imagine a thousand men, unused to Army life, gathered together on a parade ground and told to stand at attention when coat-collars were threatening to choke half of them into insensibility and the other half were entangled in spiral [puttees?] improperly wrapped.

A group of 60 Negro officers stood to one side, each one of whom stood erect in freshly-pressed [sorge?] uniforms, Sam Browne belt shining to match leather boots.

One officer advanced toward us several paces and read from a paper. “General Order. You men will comprise the 368th Infantry Regiment of the Ninety-Second Division, U. S. National Army, composed of drafted men from Eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. You will now enter upon a training period which will fit you for duty overseas.”

So in October, 1917, the 368th was formed and I stayed with that outfit throughout the war. The men in my barracks became Company “G” of the 368th, and we had three second lieutenants, three first lieutenants and our company Commander was Captain Queen.

Captain Queen sent for me the next day, the orderly who gave me the order told me to report to company headquarters. As I came up the walk, I passed an armed guard standing in front of a large flag, and he brought his gun to the ready and asked,

“Hey, buddy, where's your manners? Don't you know better'n walk past the colors without saluting?”

He patted his gun suggestively so I turned toward the colors, as he called it, and gave the only salute I knew, a Boy Scout salute learned as a child.

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The guard looked at me rather disgustedly, and commented, “You're in the army now and we'll make a soldier out of you yet.” I reported at the door and was sent to Captain Queen.

“You wanted to see me? I inquired. The captain cut in on me. “Soldier. When you are told to report to an officer, always salute until recognized, saying “Corporal Johnson reporting, sir.” then stand at attention.”

“Yes sir.”

“I see by your draft board that you can use a typewriter. I'm making you a company clerk, with rank of corporal. You'll report to Lieut. Hinkson, in charge of headquarters platoon. Dismiss.”

I managed a credible salute, turned on my heel and marched out. In the Army one day and already a corporal. I went over to the supply sergeant, drew my chevrons, and walked over to the barracks where I commenced sewing them on. Then, feeling very proud of my new rank, reported to headquarters platoon.

This time I had everything right. I saluted as I passed the colors, had a soldier point out Lieut. Hinkson, walked over to him, saluted and said, “Corporal Johnson reporting for duty as ordered by Captain Queen, sir.”

The Lieutenant gravely returned my salute, glanced at my sleeve and said “Corporal, You're chevrons are quite new”, he said. I answered proudly, “Yes sir, Lieutenant.”

“Well, they're sewn on upside down,” he snapped, “Go to the company tailor and have them adjusted properly.”

We drilled in the morning and had our afternoons free. But we were told to watch the bulletin board for special orders from regimental headquarters. But as there were always plenty of officers down there and we were required to salute each one we met, we stayed 5 near our barracks or in the recreation hall.

One day, about three o'clock in the afternoon, nearly the entire company was watching a ball game when someone shouted “Tenshun.” In the Army when an officer came around enlisted men, the first person to observe the officer called out “Tenshun,” and we stood at attention until the officer said “At ease” or departed.

We looked around and saw Captain Queen striding toward us. “Why aren't you men on the parade ground?”

We looked around at each other, startled by the question. Nobody answered.

“Didn't you see the notice for regimental review and parade posted on the bulletin board?”

One brash follow spoke up. “I was down there this morning and didn't see any notice. It must have just been tacked up.”

Captain Queen, a former Regular [Armyman?] with the 24th infantry, sputtered, “Just put up! Why that notice has been on the bulletin board ever since George Washington was on the police force.”

We found out the notice hadn't been up quite that long but it had been up for a week. And we were supposed to be reviewed by a major-general. The major General, with his staff, had come from another camp, our camp commander, a band, and quite a number of officers, were assembled on the parade ground for a review and inspection which never came off.

Our Captain Queen had just completed a course of instruction at a fort at Des Moines, Iowa, along with a thousand other colored men, all of whom were given commissions as captain, or lieutenant, signed by the President, Woodrow Wilson, and which said that they were 'officers and gentlemen'.

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Captain Queen had been a top sergeant in the 24th Regular Army Regiment when they were stationed in Arizona and chased the Indians. His brother had graduated from the Officers' Training School at the same time, but he was commissioned a lieutenant in the machine gun detachment of our regiment.

Captain Queen was younger than his brother, the Lieutenant, but the now outranked him. So the older brother, the machine gunner, was compelled to salute his baby brother, the captain.

I soon learned the distinction between an officer and myself. I studied the Army Manual, The School of the Soldier, learned how to clean and care for a rifle, how to execute “order arms” without smashing my toes. I learned the difference between a canteen and a latrine. Being in the headquarters platoon, I was able to find out news of impending troop

movements. In fact, I typed the order cancelling all leaves and ordering the men to report to the parade grounds with packs and in full marching order.

We were reviewed and inspected and then marked direct to a waiting train. Once on the train we were issued cards on which we wrote, Am leaving for somewhere in France. Goodbye.

We detrained at Hoboken. When we arrived darkness had fallen and it was raining a little. In the drizzle we were marched up the gang-plank of a transport and told to stay below decks until we were well out to sea.

The next morning Captain Queen sent for me. I had on a life preserver, as did everyone else. The captain wanted the company roster (list of men) as he was going to put us through Abandon Ship Drill. When I came on deck I was able to see other troopships, [camouflageed?] with vertical stripes and pursuing a zigzag course, convoyed by eight or ten destroyers.

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The North Atlantic was cold and dismal. In fact, the whole business was rather grim and uninspiring, but we reached Brest without incident, didn't even have one submarine scare on the way over.

It was in Brest that I saw some colored soldiers wearing red fezzes and tan uniforms, standing on one of the street corners. One of the men from my company, who came originally from a small town, crossed over the street toward them and inquired.

“Where can I get some cigarettes in the Frog town?” The red-fezzed soldiers glanced at him, spoke among themselves, then turned to him and shrugged complete incomprehension.

Library of Congress

I saw that my friend was becoming angry so I crossed over. “What's the trouble, bud?”, I asked.

“These big boys act like they don't want to have anything to do with me. They're talking a lot of gibberish, won't answer my questions.”

I had a little trouble convincing him that “those big boys” were FRENCH Africans, couldn't understand English and weren't trying to be high hat.

Later on I ran into another bunch of Algerians who had been at the Front and who carried around fingers from dead Germans.

We went into intensive training and after six weeks we marched up to the town of Nancy in the Department of Douliard. We marched at night, rested in fields by day and noticed the almost solid lines of truck headed toward the Front, and passed troops returning from a tour of duty in the front line trenches.

In each squad, in addition to the riflemen there were [grenadiers?] who carried hand grenades. While we were marching we had the first casualty in our company. A grenadier, a belt of hand [grenadea?] strapped around his middle, stumbled and fell, the grenades exploded, everybody 8 who could, jumped into ditches or flattened themselves on the ground. Total score, three dead and eight wounded.

Of the dead we buried two, but the third, the grenadier was blown to bits, nothing left but a hole in the road.

We were in the [Argonne?] Forest when the pig push started an September 26, 1918 and we stayed in there five days, part of the time we were shelled by our own artillery in support, the 349th Filed Artillery Regiment. We had no battle flags, no shears to cut barbed wire entaglements, our liaison [men?] (runners with messengers) were all killed or wounded trying to get through with messages.

Lieut. Hinkson, dressed in a private's uniform and carrying a rifle as well as a sidearm (automat automatic) had stood up and shouted, “As skirmishers, guide center. Deploy” when a machine gun, hidden in the woods, cut him down.

Enemy airplanes flow over us several times, dropping pamphlets addressed to us. “Colored Americans. We have no quarrel with you. We are your friends. Throw down your arms and cover over to our side. We will treat you better than you are treated in the South”.”

But I don't remember a single case of desertion.

After the [Argonns?], we went up into the [Vosgen?] Mountains, where it was rather quiet. We needed it for we had been cut up pretty badly. Replacements (soldiers sent to a unit to replace the dead and wounded) were sent us, and I was promoted to Sergeant. The replacement were creoles from Louisiana. They spoke French and one became our company interpreter. So soon every soldier picked up a few words of French.

One night I was on duty as Sergeant of the Guard and while at Post Number one (the guard house) one of the sentries posted on 9 the mountainside became frightened by a movement in the wooded section and threw a grenade in that direction. Then he knelt and when we reached him we could hear what was possibly the only prayer spoken in French and English. His arms were outstretched and he implored, “Oh, Lord, save me. Come here and save me [si'l?] vous plait, tout suite.”

Armistice Day found us before Metz. We were waiting to storm a great walled city which would have cost us many men, as we would have to cross a level plain about two miles long.

In December 1918 we were marched to [Le Mona?], the central delousing plant of the A. E. F. Here we had our clothes taken from us, and I lost my sweater which had been knitted for me by my girl friend, we were plunged into baths, and when we came out the other end

we were given clean clothes, and that was the end of the big gray cooties which had been our constant companions.

Back to the mud of [Brest?] and here we embarked for home near the end of February, 1919, and after staying in Camp Upton a few days we were sent to Camp [Meade?], Maryland where on March 5, 1919 we were given a bonus of $60, an honorable discharge, and the 368th Infantry regiment became a part of history.